



March 13, 2011

TESTIMONY OF GAYLE WEINSTEIN

TO THE LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 5400

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present testimony in support of H.B. 5400,
An Act Concerning Municipal Employee Retirement System Contribution Rate.

As you know, municipalities are under tremendous pressure to keep property taxes stable. This is particularly important to me because unemployment, usage of the Town's food pantry, and Social Service needs are all on the rise in Weston. Quite simply, we must keep property taxes stable so that our Senior Citizens and those facing financial difficulties can stay in Weston.

Employee pensions are one of the biggest drivers for municipal budgets. Last year, increases in our employer contributions to the Municipal Employee Retirement System (MERS) made up 80% of the total town budget increase and this current fiscal year, made up 52% of the total town budget increase. Ten years ago, Weston's MERS contribution was \$228,400 or 2.4 % of its total operating budget. This year, that number has grown to \$782,000 or 7% of the Town budget. It may surprise you that our pension obligations have even outpaced the increases in health insurance.

During the past ten years, the Town's contribution has increased 420% for most employees, and 436% for public safety personnel. During that same time period, the employee's contribution increase has been zero.

In order to offset these tremendous increases, we have been forced to reduce town services and lay off employees. Last year, we had to reduce our land use department to four days a week, and every department has had some level of reduction over the past four years. I ask that the Labor and Public Employees Committee consider a modest increase in the employee contribution to help municipalities cope with these increases and prevent additional staff reductions.

In 2002, the employer-employee contribution rate was 55% municipality/45% employee. In July, it will become 84% municipality/16% employee for all non public safety employees. This imbalance can only be corrected through Legislative action. All we ask is that we regain some level of parity that was in place when this pension system was created.

Please support H.B. 5400 which will increase the employee contribution rate in MERS participating communities.

Respectfully submitted,



Gayle Weinstein

First Selectman